At pre-contact: Intermediates attended the racquet, legs or shoulders or both simultaneously.

- At the point of contact both groups focussed primarily on the ball.
- Post-contact results suggest that novices focus on the ball or the racquet, while intermediates are able to narrow their focus to the ball only.
- With the exception of single-handed backhands hit cross court, intermediates are significantly better at predicting a backhand, hit with one or two hands, slice or topspin, or hit down the line or cross court than novices.

Potential explanations of the study’s findings:

- The current generation of “coaches” are more likely to hit with a one handed backhand and novices are subsequently more familiar with this type of stroke.
- Cross court strokes are in the main, taught and practised before down the line strokes.

APPLIED FINDINGS FOR COACHES

1. Coaches should try to expose players to one and two handed backhands at an early age along with topspin and slice strokes.
2. Coaches should actively instruct players to focus on their opponent - more specifically their racquets, shoulder rotation and positioning of their legs - for advanced cues prior to contact and NOT the ball.
3. Subsequent instructions should be to re-focus on the ball following the opponent’s racquet-ball impact.
4. With the modern proliferation of the open stance backhand, the upper body (shoulders) should remain a point of “cue” focus when players are under pressure.

References


Suggestions for Designing a Tennis-Specific Strength and Conditioning Program

By Adrian Faccioni, Alan Pearce and David Fisher (Australia)

INTRODUCTION

In tennis, the optimal execution of any given stroke requires different adaptations of learned motor patterns in coordination with the requirements of strength, power, speed, agility and balance.

Strength and conditioning training not only prepares the athletes for such demands, but also enables complete integration with the tactical/technical and psychological elements of the sport. Meaningful integration of conditioning training with the required game skills assists the athletes’ understanding of these requirements of the sport. Further, results of such integrated programs are athletes that enjoy their physical training as much as playing tennis.

This article aims to give coaches who may also be responsible for their athlete(s) conditioning sessions some suggestions in designing programs that are specific to the sport as well as giving athletes meaningful exercises at training.

Prescription of conditioning training vs. specific (or realistic) of tennis.

Coaches will be familiar with the theoretical concepts of specificity; that is the maximum benefits of a training stimulus can only be obtained when it replicates the movements and energy systems involved in the activities of a sport (Rushall and Pyke, 1990), therefore the greater the similarity of a training activity, the more likely transfer of adaptation to performance (Fleck and Kraemer, 1987).

As McClellan and Bugg (1999) correctly point out, many conditioning exercises prescribed by coaches of tennis athletes as ‘specific’ to tennis are in reality exercises for general fitness development. These exercises include (amongst others) leg presses, squats, leg extensions, leg curls, bench press, dumbbell flyes, and reverse flyes.

So although these exercises can benefit the tennis athlete, why are they not tennis-specific exercises? Table 1 summarises the fundamental differences between these exercises and the realities of the sport, with Figures 1 and 2 illustrating differences between traditional and specific exercises.

Suggestions for programming conditioning training.

Coaches can work on athletes’ conditioning not only in the gym environment, but also at the courts. In many cases coaches may not have opportunities to get to a gym, therefore athletes’ have no alternative but to improvise specific exercises at the courts. Similar to the gymnasium environment, there are specific exercises that will transfer to the sport more effectively than generic exercises. Coaches should aim to prescribe exercises that are specific to serving, return of serve and movement during rallies. Table 2 shows some simple but effective alternatives to traditional exercises.

Athletes’ who have access to
Table 1. Summary of conditioning exercises prescribed compared to the realities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional conditioning</th>
<th>Realities of the sport</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Exercises are bilateral (both limbs move together during exercise).</td>
<td>● Movements are unilateral (one side provides force production).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Prescribes leg exercises in squat nature.</td>
<td>● Leg movements are usually of a lunging nature (or at least in a split position).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Apart from selected abdominal exercises, exercises are performed in one plane.</td>
<td>● Skills revolve around rotational movements in a multi-plane environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Focus is on maximal strength as an assumption of force development.</td>
<td>● Sports are time related, thus power is more important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Conditioning is primarily involved with initial movement.</td>
<td>● Rallies are generally lost due to ineffective recovery once execution of a shot is completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Little proprioception work.</td>
<td>● Strokes and movements require good transfer of balance and body self-awareness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The development of independence in tennis players is one of the foremost objectives in tennis training. As is the case with all open skill sports, the ability to evaluate situations and make positive decisions is a constant for successful player development.

A player's independence is closely associated to his level of self-confidence, and its development should commence upon the player's first introduction to the game. Self-confidence is the belief that you can successfully perform a desired behaviour.

As coaches, it is our job to help players develop their confidence and accomplish their goals (i.e. victory). Realistically evaluating players' strengths and weaknesses, and then demonstrating our faith in their ability to succeed, will help here. To invest such faith in a player is quite “persuasive” in facilitating that player's belief in his own abilities.

On the contrary, if as coaches we are not confident in ourselves, it is difficult to transfer confidence to our players. An interesting aside to any successful transfer though, is that players are provided with a direct example of confidence at work such that they can begin the process of increasing their own self-confidence. A process that is largely defined by the